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"Our heads did not accept it" – development and nostalgia in Southeastern Anatolia[1]

Wolfgang Wohlwend
Ethnographic Museum of the University of Zürich, Pelikanstrasse 40, CH-8001 Zürich

Abstract. This article examines the role of collectively shared nostalgia after a development-induced loss in Halfeti, a town in Southeastern Anatolia, Turkey. In 2000, part of Halfeti was flooded to form a dam reservoir as part of the Southeastern Anatolia Project (GAP). The reservoir submerged part of the town's residential area as well as a large complex of orchards that were an integral part of pre-dam life in Halfeti. Ten years later, Halfeti's residents shared a nostalgic, idealised image of the past, dubbed as *eski hali*, the 'old state', in contrast to *yeni hali*, the 'new state', which they viewed as being highly unpredictable at both local and global levels. During my research, I found it apparent that the orchards had been central to the economic, social and emotional life of the inhabitants of Halfeti. They were an expression of the social relationships in Halfeti and, in memory, a projection of shared community ideals. This article examines the role of these orchards as mirrored in nostalgic narratives about the *eski hali*.
[*memory, nostalgia, development, resettlement, Southeastern Anatolia Project, GAP, Turkey*]

Introduction

In 2000, construction of the Birecik dam in Southeastern Anatolia in Turkey was completed. Engineers and other representatives of the Güneydoğu Anadolu Projesi or GAP ('Southeastern Anatolia Project') had inspected towns and villages in the Euphrates valley for several months before commissioning the dam. Together with 21 other dams, this was designed to provide the fundamental infrastructure for the most ambitious development project in the country's history. GAP's Regional Development Agency (GAP-RDA) had established various information centres and organised workshops to brief the population about life after the dam. From the agency's perspective, things were going quite well.

They told residents that Halfeti, the biggest town in the homonymous district, would be significantly affected by the dam formation, like numerous other villages along the Euphrates riverbank. It was bad news for the inhabitants, of course, a dire

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sacrifice but, after all, this would eventually be for the benefit of the entire nation. "We thought, when the state needs us, we will of course step in. So we did not resist," Mehmet told me in his small tea shop. Mehmet was a very well-connected and respected man in his local area and held the position of a *muhtar*, the democratically elected head of the *mahalle,* the neighbourhood where I also lived. For decades Mehmet had been working as *çaycı* selling tea in his small shop, which I used to frequent in the mornings.

"The engineers told us the water would rise up to forty metres above the original level, they showed us the exact spot the water would come up to." Halfeti's green strip of orchard plots lay directly on the riverbank, extending for several kilometres up- and downstream. The rising water would submerge all of the orchards close to the riverbank and destroy every building within a 50 metre-radius inside the western limits of the residential zone. The authorities advised the owners to clear their orchards, cutting down all trees and plants in order to prevent rotting biomass to affect the water quality. Those who would lose their homes were advised to remove their belongings and relocate to one of the 250 newly-built houses further up the plateau that they had been assigned.

When the water rose, it happened so quickly that everyone was taken by surprise. Nobody seemed to have taken any precautions. Most of the trees stood untouched, ripe with fruit, as it was harvest time. People's homes were still fully furnished. "We were panicking", Mehmet continued, "we didn't know what to do first – salvage fruit and wood from our orchards or save our belongings from our houses."

That morning, Mehmet was showing me his collection of photographs that he had taken every day during the flood, from many different points of view. He filled dozens of film rolls as he clicked away at the incomprehensible. "Our orchards were further downstream, so would get flooded before our houses would. We drove there as fast as we could and tried to salvage the fruit from the trees. Some of them were already in the water and we had to use boats to pick the plums. Everyone was looking for chainsaws to save some firewood for the winter. The valley was echoing with the sound of chainsaw motors. Meanwhile, the water was rising where our house was, so we had to hurry back to rescue our belongings."

As an outsider, I was startled by the dissonance between the state's purported open communication and the way that the flood had taken Halfeti's inhabitants by surprise. When I asked Mehmet to explain this to me, he answered: "Yes, of course, they had told us everything. But our heads did not accept it."

Kafalarımız kabul etmedi – "Our heads did not accept it". This was a phrase I would often encounter during my research, in people's oral recollections of the flooding of Halfeti. In some interviews, informants would note how difficult it had been to imagine the relatively small existing river turning into a lake. Yet, on deeper consideration, it would be misleading to reduce this emic explanation merely to a lack of imagination. During my research, it became apparent that these orchards were central to the economic, social and emotional life of the inhabitants of Halfeti. They were an

expression of their social relationships and, in memory, a projection of shared community ideals. Their loss had been a traumatic experience for many people and, in interviews, they unequivocally named the orchards as the thing that they most missed in post-dam Halfeti. I therefore consider them the single most important and unique feature of pre-dam Halfeti in retrospective, and the biggest difference between Halfeti before and after the flood. In this article, I aim to provide a selective overview of the multiple roles that the orchards played in pre-dam Halfeti. These encompass being a source of economic income, a living space and the locus of social life through reciprocity, mutual obligation and transgenerational ties.

Eski hali/yeni hali

This account will be presented from an unusual ethnographic perspective. As I could not witness the orchards themselves, I relied mainly on oral recollections of the orchards as my main data source. When I started my fieldwork in the winter of 2009/10, the events described above had happened ten years earlier. The ethnographic present (Sanjek 1991) of my research really lies in the past, in multiple senses. Tim Ingold identifies the ethnographic present as a projection of a researcher's own past, onto "another place and another people". Similar to the dreamlike recollection of childhood memories, these projections do not follow a linear, chronological order, but resemble a place where "time stood still" (Ingold 2005). The past as "another place" inhabited by "other people" was also problematised by historian David Lowenthal (1985), who argues that the past comprises both events that have happened and the ways that we view – or want to view – what has happened from the vantage point of the (ethnographic) present. According to this perspective, the subject of this article is a double projection. I am writing about the projection of a past that my informants recollected, seen through the projection of my own past in the field.

The term *memory* is, of course, a very broad one and a large body of literature exists on the subject, first and foremost in the disciplines of cognitive psychology and psychoanalysis, which often show a tendency to objectify memory and neglect the agency of the remembering self (Antze and Lambek 1996). From an anthropological point of view, memory can be examined as a social and cultural phenomenon. Ingold (1996, 2000) proposes three different views on memory: Firstly, memory as recollection and commemoration. Secondly, memory as a representation of events that have occurred (or are supposed to have occurred), in literature, oral tradition, drama or material culture. Lastly, memory can be seen as an aspect of human skill, i. e. the embodiment of socio-biological, culturally transmitted capabilities, established in the living organism during the course of socialisation.

I follow the notion of *collective memory,* as originally proposed by Maurice Halbwachs. In *La mémoire collective* (1950), the Durkheimian student Halbwachs identifies the act of remembering as being implicitly social. He adapts the Durkheimian distinc-

tion between individual and collective consciousness, which are both equally present within an individual. According to this idea, collective consciousness consists of "convictions and sensations" which are present in all members of a group in relative consistency (Echterhoff and Saar 2002). Memory, as a form of knowing, thus depends on interaction with others in a group, which can be a virtual group. Memories are formed, established and shared in a dialectic movement between individual and community, and between past and present within a mnemonic community (Cappelletto 2003). Connerton describes this collective memory as "a kind of connective autobiography", combining threads of narratives to ultimately weave a "master narrative" (1989). The past lends itself to these master narratives, because of its conclusive nature, in contrast to the experienced present, which is heterogeneous and unstructured. Thus, the raw experience is easier to structure in hindsight (Lowenthal 1996).

Yet, as Bloch (2011) points out, there are limits to what an individual can readily access from their mind and how they can express these perceptions. What is shared within a mnemonic community are not the memories themselves, but meta-representations thereof. These meta-representations in turn follow rules of cultural acceptability and form.

Imagination helps to establish a certain homogeneity, consistency and order. The structured, imagined past produces a common order reference and therefore constitutes part of the community's identity. These master narratives are, of course, malleable and the privilege to tell the "authoritative version" seldom lies with an individual alone, but is subject to political debates and power relationships at work in the local community and beyond (Antze and Lambek 1996).

Finally, it is important to note that, in order to attain this structured imagination of the past, *forgetting* plays an equally important role as *remembering* (Connerton 2008, Lowenthal 1996). Connerton argues that forgetting is not simply the failure to remember. In a political context, forgetting can play an important role in the induction of historical change and the enforcement of identity change (Connerton 2008).

The sociality of memories also extends to the temporal structuring of past events. Psychological studies suggest that individuals use certain events as temporal landmarks in order to organise their memories on a cognitive level. Birth (2006) points to the cultural variability of these temporal landmarks and argues that their use is part of a dialogic, socially-oriented process of crafting one's own identity. In the case of Halfeti, the flooding of the Euphrates river valley and the similar impact it had on the entire society obviously lends itself to a temporal landmark. Local discourses on pre-dam and post-dam Halfeti have been conceptualized using the terms *eski hali* and *yeni hali*, the "old state" and the "new state". These two expressions have become widely used in everyday language. Diptychs of photographs showing the town in both its *eski hali* and *yeni hali* states have become very popular and can be found hanging on the walls of shops, offices and living rooms. Since the first efforts to market Halfeti as a tourist destination, *eski hali/yeni hali* items, such as cups or posters, have also been sold as souvenirs.

Eski hali and *yeni hali* differ in several ways. I propose that the master narrative of the *eski hali* describes a state of order and timelessness, where Halfeti was a community that lived according to certain ideals of sociality and conviviality, with strong social ties that were both vertical – i. e. with a sense of ancestry, and horizontal – with family and neighbours. The *eski hali* was a situation where social relationships were marked by trust and a community-first ideology, in which money and individual profit were less important than sharing and mutual obligation. The *eski hali* also presents a claim for authenticity, where time was ordered according to the 'natural rhythm' of the orchards, with an apparently almost primordial inevitability of tasks.

In stark contrast, the *yeni hali* is a time of constant change and disorder that leaves little room for predictability. While *eski hali* was born out of the community and a perceived natural order, the *yeni hali* had an exogenous cause. The *yeni hali* 'happened' after the Birecik dam was built, in much the same way that a natural catastrophe occurs. In the *yeni hali*, the community has become fragmentised. Social relationships are fraught with distrust, greed and envy, and selfishness has taken the place of former ideals.

Halfeti

Halfeti is the name of a district in Southeastern Anatolia, Turkey. According to 2008 official figures, it is home to almost 40,000 inhabitants (Halfeti Kaymakamlığı 2015). The district consists of 36 villages, most of which are Turkish, although some are Kurdish and Turkmen. It is part of Şanlıurfa, a province on the Turkish-Syrian border which is situated on the arid Mesopotamian plateau, bordered to the west by the riverbanks of the Euphrates, where the river had cut a steep and narrow valley into the limestone.

Originally, the district's homonymous capital Halfeti was situated in the Euphrates valley floor. Before 2000, Halfeti consisted of four 'neighbourhoods' or *mahalle:* Şimaliye, Rüştiye and Başbostan in the centre and Çekem, about five kilometres outside of town.

Halfeti was the administrative, juridical, economic and educational centre of the district. It hosted several state buildings, such as offices and courts, elementary and secondary schools and a prison, as well as a military barracks and a permanent market. The town was also home to a variety of small businesses, which mainly catered to the needs of the numerous soldiers and civil servants on duty in the Southeast, along with their families.

Halfeti was partly destroyed by the dam reservoir in 2000 and rendered a hostile environment to large parts of the former population. The remaining town was renamed *Eski Halfeti*, 'Old Halfeti'. A substantial part of the former town's population was relocated to a new settlement called *Yeni Halfeti*, 'New Halfeti', absorbing a former Kurdish village called Karaotlak. Yeni Halfeti officially became the new district

capital in 2005. All official state buildings, except the military base, were relocated to Yeni Halfeti in 2012.

At the time of my research, a small population of around 300 individuals were still living in Eski Halfeti. Generally speaking, these were families that could not (yet) afford to move to Yeni Halfeti. Difficult economic circumstances hinted towards a probable further decline in the forthcoming years.

At that time, the state seemed largely disinterested in supporting the development of tourism in Eski Halfeti. However, this has changed since then. A lot of effort has recently been made to put Halfeti on the map for both domestic and international tourism. Several developments have supported these efforts. On the one hand, Halfeti has become famous nationwide for being the location of the popular telenovela called 'Karagül', whose name is reminiscent of a locally-famous breed of black roses. On the other hand, Halfeti has attained membership of the 'Cittàslow movement', alongside 192 cities from 30 other countries. Cittàslow is an international network of so-called 'slow' municipalities. The movement was founded in 1999 and states its aims as connecting municipalities from "a recovered time, where humans are still the protagonists in the slow and healthy succession of seasons". Cittàslow is seeking the "modern times counterpart" and "looking for the best of the knowledge from the past and enjoying it, thanks to the best possibilities of the present and of the future" (Cittàslow 2011).

The Cittàslow label may be helpful for catering to tourists' escapist fantasies and, in this way, provide good publicity for the small but flourishing tourism sector. However, if one examines the recent history of Halfeti, this label appears in a strangely ironic light. Apart from the blatant exoticism of this approach, the Halfeti of today is precisely the opposite of Cittàslow's description. Halfeti in the *yeni hali* is no modern times counterpart, but the local result of the GAP, an endeavour that could not be less "modern".

Nonetheless, all this attention helped Eski Halfeti to become a popular domestic tourist destination. For a while, it seemed that the resulting new business opportunities had halted, if not reversed, the economic decline after the flood. Yet, at the time of writing, civil war in neighbouring Syria has been raging for over four years and the bloodshed between the Turkish Armed Forces and the PKK guerrillas are flaring up anew, posing a real threat to Halfeti's newly attained economic prosperity through tourism.

GAP

The Güneydoğu Anadolu Projesi or GAP ('Southeastern Anatolia Project') is one of many very large, state-run 20th century development projects based on the exploitation of hydropower. Its main focus lies on the economic exploitation of Turkey's two major rivers, the Euphrates and Tigris, which have acted as arteries through the greater Mesopotamian region since prehistoric times. Established in 1989, it is the result of ambitions that date back to the 1930s.

In its scope and size, it is a genuinely "high-modernist" project (Scott 1999) which is designed to completely change the face of a whole region. Southeastern Anatolia constitutes about 10 % of Turkey's surface area and is home to 10 % of its population. GAP was established in to create at least 3.5 million jobs through the project itself and its numerous spin-offs. Once completed, 22 major dams will allow the Turkish state to harness the economic capacities of the rivers by means of hydroelectric plants and large-scale irrigation schemes (GAP 2006).

The distribution of resources through a megaproject of this size and scope can cause very asynchronous relationships between loss and benefit at the local level. In the case of the Euphrates, irrigation water is being channelled over long distances from north to south. The water from the Atatürk Barajı, for instance, irrigates cotton plantations in the desert south of Harran, a town which borders Syria, more than 150 km away. At the time of research, however, irrigation was not being carried out further north, where the dams are located. Thus, the inhabitants of upstream towns and villages are making a sacrifice without direct reward, in order to achieve agricultural prosperity for those in the south.

Hydroelectric projects of this scale often have adverse effects on the riparian population and regional ecosystems (McCully 2001). Depending on the topography, dam reservoirs can cover very large surface areas. The GAP's largest dam, the Atatürk Barajı, contains a reservoir with a surface area larger than Lake Constance or Lake Balaton, which flooded the archaeological site of Samosata and dislocated around 2,000 people. According to one estimate, the much smaller Birecik Barajı dam displaced 30,000 people (Brauer 2011), however, these numbers are not verifiable by other sources. It also flooded sites of archaeological interest, such as the ancient settlement of Zeugma, whose famous mosaics have been salvaged and stored in the Gaziantep Museum.

In the case of Halfeti, I consider the loss of the orchards to be the most important direct impact that the Birecik dam reservoir had on the town population, following the loss of their homes.

Eski hali: the case of the orchards

The Euphrates river basin cuts deep into the Mesopotamian plateau, its cross-section forming a narrow trapezium with the top slightly wider than the base. The fertile soils at the bottom were almost exclusively used for cultivating the orchards, while houses were built far above, on the dry and rocky slopes of the river basin. The topography of the Euphrates river valley created a microclimate that resembled Turkey's Aegean coast, with a high amount of sunshine throughout the year, along with an optimal average temperature and humidity for vegetable growth. In addition to this climate, the soil at the bottom of the valley was enriched with fertile sediments from the Euphrates.

These orchards varied in size from small patches to plots of several hundred hectares for intensive agricultural use. In pre-dam Halfeti, they served a variety of pur-

poses, which I consider were central to social and economic life: as a source of subsistence, revenue and autonomy, as a living space, as an expression of social life and as a locus of identity formation.

The annual harvests provided each household with a diversified diet and considerable monetary revenue. The orchards allowed almost self-sufficient living during the entire year, where only few basic comestible goods, such as grain, had to be acquired from outside of Halfeti.

The orchards were explicitly private property. Each plot belonged to a specific proprietor, usually the male head of a household. The borders of these private properties extended into the river. Consequentially, the right to fish from certain areas of the riverbank was equally bound to the land property. Every proprietor held a legal title to their land, registered at the municipality's land registry, the *kadastro*. However, not every orchard was maintained by its proprietor. Many legal title tenants had migrated out of Halfeti and entrusted their plots to their remaining relatives in return for a share of the harvest. This eventually had consequences in connection to the compensation paid out after the flooding, which I will discuss later.

In contrast, the irrigation system for the orchard complex, called the *arık*, belonged in the public domain. At the northern end of town, a steep, shady and green ravine called Değirmendere cuts into the steep slope and is still easily accessible today. The *arık* was fed by the rapid water flowing down the ravine and distributed through an intricate system of irrigation channels. The water in the Değirmendere could gather enough speed to distribute water over a distance of five kilometres without any need for external energy. A system of gates meant that the water from the main line could be diverted to orchard plots, and an owner could claim a specific amount of watering time per week. While the amount of water was supervised by the municipality, the diversion of this water was done directly by the orchard owners.

Bayram was my main informant on the topic of the orchards. At the time of my research, Bayram was about 40 years old and a proud father of two daughters. He ran his own shop as a *bakkal*, offering an eclectic variety of everyday household items, from fresh and preserved foods, light bulbs and batteries to tobacco and newspapers. As a devout Muslim, Bayram abstained from selling alcoholic drinks, unlike many other *bakkal* in town. Bayram was very attached to the orchards and his family used to look after an orchard plot belonging to some relatives who lived in Gaziantep. He had experienced the loss of the orchards as particularly traumatizing. Bayram couldn't bear the sound of all the chainsaws echoing in the valley as the orchard owners tried to salvage firewood from the rising floods, so he fled to Gaziantep for several months. Since then, Bayram had found some comfort in a rediscovered religiosity. Bayram was one of my first regular contacts in Halfeti and we quickly established a mutual sympathy. A visit to his shop for a conversation over tea and tobacco became my daily routine and would frequently continue until late at night.

Naturally, our conversations often revolved around the orchards. Bayram's descriptions of the orchards were very similar to other recollections I encountered in my re-

search. For the sake of simplicity, I rely mainly on his description as a model of the orchards in the *eski hali.*

When I first asked Bayram about the orchards, he began by praising the diverse produce they could harvest from them: "We had apricots, walnuts, pomegranates, and tangerines – so many kinds of tangerines! Grapefruit, there were even bananas here! The quality was very good. When someone cut a cucumber a hundred metres away, you could smell it here". As it turned out, Bayram's enthusiastic praise of the orchard was not an idiosyncrasy, but a very common way that the master narrative on the orchards would start: with an emphasis on diversity, abundance and quality.

Bayram also liked to emphasise the point that the orchards represented much more than simple resources for subsistence: "When spring came, and the nights were warm enough, we moved everything from our houses out to the orchards, even the fridges! We built our *çardak* [An elevated platform on stilts] there, where we would sleep under the stars, listening to the river while falling asleep". In the mercilessly hot summer months in this region, this open-air "multistar hotel", as Bayram jokingly liked to call it, provided some relief, being exposed to the mild air among the trees and close to the river. Some families even chose to spend the entire year in the orchard, building more permanent houses. In one case, this even turned a number of orchards into a living quarter in its own right. In the north of Halfeti, Başbostan (which translates as 'main garden') was, in fact, an orchard-turned-residential zone which had been given the official status of a *mahalle*.

The orchards were thus part of the actual residential area in Halfeti that extended well beyond the structures of houses and streets sited above the green strip. Thus, the flood not only touched the margins of the living area, but *de facto* rid Halfeti of half of its living space and destroyed the rhythm of summer and winter housing. The orchards' summer homes were just as subject to cultural expectations for home, hospitality and good neighbourhoods as their winter counterparts were. As one of my informants put it, the orchards were an *ortam noktası,* Halfeti's 'common denominator'. The orchards had specific practices in common with the *mahalle*, such as 'neighbouring', the exchange of gifts and spontaneous visits.

The term *mahalle* can be roughly translated as neighbourhood or quarter, i. e. a spatial entity in an urban or rural space which has more or less clear boundaries and is composed of a number of streets, houses and public amenities. Moreover, a *mahalle* surpasses the simple notion of a neighbourhood. Firstly, it is the smallest administrative unit in the Turkish state, presided and administered by a democratically-elected official representative, the *muhtar.* Secondly, the *mahalle* is a space of high social and emotional significance, a locus of identity formation and a hybrid between private and public space. In urban Turkey, the family's interior space is traditionally extended to the *mahalle.* According to Mills, it is "a space of belonging and collectivity", where the practices of 'neighbouring' (*komşuluk)* which, for example, encompasses the habit of frequent reciprocal visits without calling beforehand, and of 'knowing each other' (*tanımak*) are the most important mainstays of this familiar space (Mills 2007). The

intimacy of the *mahalle* is often emphasised by kinship relationships, especially in rural regions. Through these practices, the private space is opened to neighbours. Participating in *komşuluk* is expected behaviour from *mahalle* residents who wish to belong to the local community.

Tanımak also includes an aspect of mutual control, since *mahalle* residents monitor each other closely. Yet, above all, the ideal *mahalle* is a group with solidarity built on the notion of trust, reciprocity and mutual obligation, in which actors can depend on each other and on the predictability of each other's actions. *Tanımak* helps contain the boundaries of trust, i. e. relationships where, implicitly, nothing malicious is expected. In the *yeni hali*, a lack of control and the resulting feeling of insecurity is much deplored.

Reciprocity and mutual obligation were important pillars of the orchard economy, because it was very onerous to cultivate the orchards. Bayram summarised the orchards' agricultural year as follows:

"Every month in the orchard was very productive. Every month meant a lot of work for the people. When spring arrived, you could already harvest plums. Halfeti was the first place where plums would get ripe! Well, first Hatay, then here. Plums from Halfeti were sold as far away as Istanbul. You harvested your orchard, put everything on a truck and carried away the harvest yourself. Or you sold it to local vendors. We had some of them here. After the plums, the apricots became ready to harvest. After the apricots, it was vegetable time, and the pomegranates got ripe, as well as tomatoes. Salad, water and rock melons. Beans were harvested and sold here. Nothing was sold elsewhere. There were only enough vegetables for the local market, for the local people. After that, another period came. There was one more yield of pomegranates, then the walnuts got ripe, and then pistachios. In autumn, the trees were cut back and the branches were collected and brought home according to one's need, where they were used to heat the ovens. Any surplus was sold to the bakery to make bread or to other people, like the civil servants."

This agricultural year, especially the harvests, relied heavily on the help of others. The workload was not evenly distributed over the year and, in particular, the prune harvest could be too much for a single family to handle. Because of this, the residents routinely resorted to asking the *mahalle* to provide additional workers during these labour peaks. The *mahalle* can therefore be regarded as a precondition for the orchard system in Halfeti. Although the plots were legally bound to a private property, working in the orchards was not a purely private activity at all.

In one of our evening conversations, Bayram and the *muhtar* Mehmet were informing me about harvest time: "During the plum harvest, ten, twenty lorries came and went every day, harvesting the orchards and loading the trucks. That was, of course, too much for a single family. They'd go and gather everyone they could find in the *mahalle* to help with the picking and loading and, in the evening, there was a big meal for everyone right in the orchard. There, the elders would tell stories of olden times to the young folks. Helpers would receive a share of the harvest or, in some rare cases, some money, if the owner was particularly well off".

Reciprocity as an expression of the community can furthermore be found in the role ascribed to specific plants in the orchards, particularly trees. Pistachio and walnut trees can live for several hundred years, but it takes up to ten years for them to develop and bear fruit for the first time. Planting a tree in old age is thus considered to be foresightful and a service to future generations.

Bülent, a then 35-year old teacher from Halfeti, told me: "In these orchards you could find seventy-year old pistachio trees that could even have been planted by an owner's grandfather. There's a saying about our pistachio trees: *Sen ek, torun yesin* – 'You sow, but your grandchild shall eat'. It takes fifteen to twenty years until those trees yield well. The pistachio is a tree for many years. Could you just cut down a tree that your father or your grandfather had planted for you? No, you couldn't."

The trees thus stood, physically and symbolically, for an intergenerational relationship based on reciprocity in a special form. The web of reciprocity not only stretched horizontally, linking coeval members of a *mahalle*, but also vertically, across generations. In this sense, the younger generations were indebted to their ancestors, for planting the trees that formed the basis of their own profit. To borrow Sahlins' term, planting trees for successive generations is a form of "generalised reciprocity", linking older and younger generations (Sahlins 1972).

This 'gift' of trees was valuable, both in economic and symbolic terms. As already mentioned, the income generated from trading the annual harvests accounted for a substantial amount of a household's income. However, money was not the main benefit derived from this gift. A closer look reveals that the orchards not only provided the basis of a modest income but – perhaps more importantly – a certain independence from the commodity market. Besides the small selection of fruits sold for cash crops, the wide variety of other fruits, berries, nuts, vegetables and – less commonly – animal husbandry, gave the households a certain level of autonomy. In contrast, in the *yeni hali*, all these goods have to be acquired at the market. This autonomy was not just a result of food production. As a side-product, the orchards provided firewood for heating in wintertime. This resource must nowadays be substituted with other fuels, like coal or plastic recovered from household waste. The flood has therefore not only deprived the Halfeti community of sources of monetary income, but also other crucial means of subsistence, ultimately making it more dependent on the market economy, with adverse effects on their households' budgets.

Considering the significance of the orchards embedded in the community, it becomes clearer what it really was that the residents' "heads could not accept". With their multiplicity of meanings and functions, the orchards were an integral part of the *mahalle* and, together with it, formed the habitat of the local community. Without either one, Halfeti changed drastically into something new and unrecognisable.

On a material level, the destruction of the orchards meant the loss of regular harvests and a considerable part of annual revenues, as well as the removal of autonomy. Additionally, this destruction rid Halfeti of an inherent part of the *mahalle* and a living space for a large part of the year, as well as a locus of social life and the material ex-

pression of intergenerational reciprocity. The announcement of the flooding and the destruction of the orchards thus heralded an economic and social void that would be difficult to fill.

Yeni hali

The years since the orchards were flooded have been very turbulent. Halfeti in the *yeni hali* has found itself in a time of rapid changes and desperation but also windfall profits and quickly-spent money, personal tragedies and shifting power relationships.

One of the first consequence of the flooding was that the local economy experienced a severe blow. The annual harvest failed and there was no surplus for the forthcoming years. Grocers and restaurants went bankrupt after the flood caused insecurity in the local population and started to influence their buying habits.

In this difficult economic situation, compensation payments were a central topic of conversation. Turkish law allows private property to be expropriated if it is in the public interest, e. g. for the benefit of large-scale energy projects like GAP. When this happens, the former owners receive monetary compensation in advance or afterwards, with interest added. In the case of Halfeti, compensation payments were announced by the state but not disbursed until over five years after the flood, due to resource allocation problems on behalf of the authorities (Kurt 2013). In the meantime, many people were forced into debt to manage their loss of income. When the first compensations were paid out in 2006, they were rapidly used up repaying the high-interest debts they had accrued.

In other cases, the compensation payments resulted in unexpectedly large windfalls, especially to the pistachio farmers in the Çekem *mahalle* outside of town, who cultivated very large tracts of land. Before the flood, Çekem farmers were usually belittled by the Halfeti townsmen as being uneducated *köylü,* 'village folk' in contrast to the cultivated *şehirli*, the 'city dwellers'. In the early years of the Turkish Republic, when the Ottoman meritocracy's large-scale land ownership crumbled under the presidency of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, some Çekem families obtained large pistachio fields on rocky, hilly and difficult terrain that no one else wanted. Due to the sheer size of these pistachio plantations, compensation payments in Çekem allegedly skyrocketed, ultimately causing a shift in power relationships within Halfeti. Whereas previously Çekem had been regarded as a backward peasant society, some families in Çekem suddenly became very wealthy and powerful. In fact, later on some of these people were the most active entrepreneurs in Eski Halfeti tourism and, in 2009, the mayor came from Çekem, a first in the history of Halfeti.

Most households affected in the town centre received much lower payments, and some were not eligible to receive any payment at all. As mentioned earlier, the orchards' legal proprietors often lived outside Halfeti, so a significant number of compensation payments were issued to individuals living in Gaziantep, other cities in Turkey

or abroad. For those households that did not receive any payment, because they lacked any legal title to an orchard, or because their property was considered to be insufficiently affected, the years straight after the flood were particularly challenging.

The *yeni hali* turned out to be a test for the community. With wealth on one side and desperation on the other, the *yeni hali* is said to be a time of distrust and greed. "Before the dam, we didn't think too much about money", the *muhtar* told me. "We had everything we needed and we helped each other out when we could. We kept visiting each other, helped in the gardens. Now look at us, we're sitting here, the days are empty, we distrust each other. This dam has taken away our humanity."

After the flood, the town transformed from a central market town into a cul-de-sac. The waters cut traffic connections north and south along the former riverbank and to the west across the river. The only remaining way out of the old town is a single, winding road which leads up the plateau towards Yeni Halfeti. In 2009 the state's office building was still based in Halfeti along with the civil servants' families, thus offering opportunities for commerce. However, plans for new office buildings in Yeni Halfeti were already public and it seemed only a matter of time until this source of income would disappear as well. Staying in Eski Halfeti had become extremely difficult and, in fact, everyone I spoke to seemed to be pondering wether to stay or leave. Although no one liked to talk about it in public, most of my informants had more or less secretly arranged to move to Yeni Halfeti. One of the few people that told me openly of his plans justified his decision by saying: "This is not my Halfeti any more. I don't recognise it any more. The trees are gone, the river is gone. In Yeni Halfeti, at least I'll have a little garden behind my house. Everybody's waiting to leave."

Yeni Halfeti was built in several stages. On the area adjacent to a Kurdish village, 250 temporary homes were built in 1999. Some years later, the state social housing authority (*Toplu Konut İdaresi*, TOKİ) began building new quarters, consisting of 100 metre square plots of land with identical concrete one-storey buildings which each had a small garden. In 2005, 136 of these houses were finished and, at the time of my research, 363 were close to completion. While the temporary homes were ceded to their new tenants for a symbolic price of 40 Turkish Lira p. a. for a duration of 15 years, the TOKİ houses are relatively expensive at 45,000 Lira each, payable at 260 Lira per month over 15 years. These are not petty amounts. In 2009, 260 Lira comprised between 10–25 % of an ordinary state employee's monthly salary, which is considered a relatively good income.

Yeni Halfeti cannot be regarded as a simple relocation of the former town. While initially, the majority of temporary home and TOKİ house owners originated from Eski Halfeti, applicants for the later stage buildings also came from the district villages, which are mostly Kurdish. From the beginning, Yeni Halfeti was intended to be a new regional urban centre in its own right.

While the TOKİ houses were formally organised by the *mahalle,* there was no coordination between the *mahalle* in Eski Halfeti and Yeni Halfeti, so the plots in these new quarters were randomly distributed among applicants by lot. Neighbourhood re-

lationships that had marked the social life of Halfeti have been effectively disrupted through this procedure. Social relationships that were based on proximity and *komşuluk* in pre-dam Halfeti did not stand the test of spatial dislocation. I was told that neighbours who had close daily interaction before the dam was built now seldom saw each other. As a result, neighbours stopped 'knowing each other' and visits became rare. In addition to a documented rise in criminal acts, including burglary, front doors tend to stay locked, which was unusual in pre-dam Halfeti.

While the *mahalle* relationships of Eski Halfeti were disrupted, the cultivation of orchards was being continued in Yeni Halfeti. However, this had a distinctly different form and meaning in the new town. Firstly, the orchards had been transformed from a source of subsistence to an expensive pastime. The plateau on which Yeni Halfeti was built is unsuitable for agriculture. The ground is very rocky and dry, so soil has to be brought from out of town and, while the *arık* in pre-dam Halfeti had provided the orchards with free water for irrigation, Yeni Halfeti now draws its water from the Değirmendere valley using hydraulic pumps which are powered by expensive electricity. The new orchards are located in gardens behind people's houses, surrounded by walls and removed from the *mahalle*'s public sphere. These new orchards are, of course, much smaller, so cannot provide large-scale food production. Therefore, food has to be bought from the markets and is often processed in some way. The household and gardening tasks that were formerly shared within the *mahalle,* such as food processing and conservation, had become obsolete. In addition to the economic and social factors described above, the orchards had also given structure and meaning to the experience of time. As Bayram concludes: "Before, we didn't have a moment to sit down. Every day we had work to do. Now look, everybody just sits around. There's no work. Our days are empty."

Conclusion

The almost exclusively positive way in which Halfeti was portrayed to me in its *eski hali* days is striking. During my research, however, I came across sources that indicated the opposite of this overwhelmingly cheerful picture, by following multiple methodological lines of enquiry. As well as mostly open ethnographic interviews and participant observation, I also assessed a large number of genealogies and biographical interviews, and studied archival material, such as cadastral maps from pre-dam Halfeti. Comparing the ethnographic material with these historical sources showed an interesting incongruence. The genealogical studies revealed that a substantial number of mentioned people were not actually living in Halfeti, but resided in major cities in Turkey, in other EU countries or in destinations even further away, such as the United States. In fact, many relatives had left decades before the dam was built. This showed me two things. First, my genealogical interview partners had outstanding recall of their ramified web of transnational kinship relationships. Second, the reasons for emigration stood in stark contrast

to the nostalgic picture of pre-dam Halfeti. Ever since the 1960s, Southeastern Anatolia had suffered an ailing economy and high unemployment rates and Halfeti evidently also suffered poverty and a lack of opportunities. At the same time, inheritance customs and a geographical restriction of space led to a scarcity of land and frictions in the local community, which prompted many people to leave Halfeti and join the nationwide massive migration movement to the country's large cities or to try their luck as 'guest workers' in Europe, where many eventually settled for good.

Additionally, I witnessed oral reports which suggested that Halfeti was hit hard by violent political oppression in the 1980s, when the military regime cracked down on organised groups, notably the leftist-revolutionary *Devrimci Yol*, but also on militant right-wing groups. My material and focus does not allow me to reproduce Halfeti's political affiliations in the years before the coup, and this remains a particularly difficult topic to talk about in public to this day. Nonetheless, these oral reports suggest that a member of almost every family was carried off to Diyarbakir prison, which was notorious for unspeakably horrific conditions and systematic torture. In Halfeti, the regime's crackdown on firearms in private households is said to have resulted in a climate of denunciation between families, causing wounds that were also difficult to heal. While I cannot verify these reports any further, they seem consistent with the general historical circumstances of pre-coup Turkey.

The political history of Southeast Anatolia since the 1970s is a very complex and difficult terrain to explore. Still, it seems evident that the events that took place in the late 1970s were still reverberating in Halfeti well into the 21st century. From the threat of civil war in the late 1970s, the military regime in the 1980s, bloodshed between the Armed Forces and the Kurdish separatists in the 1990s and, sadly and most recently, the violence in Syria and, again, between Kurdish militants and the state, Halfeti has been either in the middle or in immediate vicinity to these violent events. The relationships between individual actors within local society and the modern Turkish state have grown under the direct influence of these circumstances. Consequently, any consideration of the local society's reactions towards a massive state-run project like GAP must take these relationships into account. In light of this complexity, generalisations should be avoided at all cost.

In this article, however, historical factuality is not in the focus. I argue that the idealised, nostalgic recollections of 'the good old times' should be seen as a master narrative as discussed earlier, i. e. a socially-constructed, post-hoc projection, restructured through emphasis and forgetting. These shared memories serve to uphold an "ontological, political, and moral order of the world" and allow each historical actor to describe the same historical event using differing narratives (Malkki 1995). Furthermore, I understand nostalgic memories to be a form of critique which is formulated from the present point of view. The nostalgia that marks my informants' recollections point to subjectively-felt deficits in the present. However, this critique does not have one specific target but is, rather, marked by a feeling of unease towards diverse agents, such as the state, the GAP-RDA or just modern life itself.

These deficits reflect cultural ideals of community and sociability, according to which the *eski hali*, with its spatial expression of the *mahalle* and its orchards, was a time of solidarity, sharing, good neighbourhoods and a controlled social environment that supported the community's autonomy and self-determination. The *eski hali* was also a time of a feeling of appropriateness. The orchards provided the optimal environment to live in the local climatic conditions, as well as near self-sufficiency of food and firewood. The y*eni hali,* however, is marked by a struggle with externally-induced circumstances including market pressures, expensive housing and goods, a rise in criminality, a dependency on tourists and the goodwill of the government and investors.

Halfeti today finds itself in a state of rapid transition, as the mechanisms of modernisation wrought by the development scheme have disrupted traditional community networks and their spatial expression, the *mahalle*, as well as replacing traditional small-scale agriculture with a social model deemed 'more modern'. The *eski hali* is a nostalgic longing for a 'golden time' that never really existed, an expression of how my informants think their world should be, and how it differs from the world they find themselves in today.

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